

****ATTENTION****

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Habitat management for

BAND-TAILED PIGEONS



In the State of Washington

The band-tailed pigeon, *Columba fasciata*, breeds in western Washington, including the western slope of the Cascades and the Olympic Peninsula. Most of the birds migrate in the fall to California, although a few may remain through the winter. It is an important game bird in the State, with over 100,000 being shot annually.

The band-tail is much larger than the related mourning dove, resembling the domestic pigeon in size and shape. The average weight is 11 or 12 ounces, with some reaching a pound. The heavy body and rounded tail immediately distinguish it from the mourning dove.

HABITAT NEEDS

Band-tails are essentially birds of the timbered mountains. In the fall they may descend to the lowlands to feed on waste grain in harvested fields.

Food. A wide assortment of fruits and seeds furnishes food for the band-tail. Acorns and Pine seeds are favorite foods when they are available. Important wild fruits include blackberries, cherries, cascara, dogwood, elder, hawthorn, huckleberries, madrone, salmon-berry, salal, and thimbleberry. Cultivated fruits (cherries and grapes) and grains (barley, corn, oats, sorghum, and wheat) are eagerly taken and the birds may cause significant damage when they invade vineyards and cherry orchards in large numbers. Except for a few grasshoppers and other large insects, animal foods are rarely eaten.

Nesting is usually on a horizontal limb, close to the trunk of a tree. The nest may be only a few feet above the ground or as high as 70 feet; the usual height is 15 to 20 feet. Occasionally it is placed on a stump, or even on the ground. The platform of sticks is so flimsy that the single white egg is in constant danger of rolling out. In Washington band-tails raise but one squab each year, feeding it on a regurgitated milk-like substance produced by glands in the crops of both parents. This low rate of reproduction indicates that the birds have few natural enemies; otherwise the species could not survive.

Water. While it is not known whether band-tails actually require free water in humid areas, they are often seen drinking. They prefer water containing mineral salts and often concentrate around mineral springs and on tide flats.

HUNTING

Hunting is most productive where pigeons are feeding, where birds come to mineral springs or tidal areas for water, and on flight lines between feeding areas in the lowlands and roosts in the forest. The band-tail's deceptively fast flight makes for difficult and sporty shooting. The birds decoy well.

LAND MANAGEMENT SUGGESTIONS

Pigeons are attracted by food and water which is readily available. Unharvested grain or mineral springs can be made more accessible if a few "perching trees" are left standing and excess trees and brush removed. Mast-producing oaks and wild fruit trees should be retained.